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WITHIN WALLS and CIRCLES

J. R. WEEKS

Stewart B. Simms
July 23, 1939
Raleigh, N.C.

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WORDS, WALLS, AND CIRCLES

by

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FOREWORD

The three sermons in this little book were preached at three different churches of Kinston, N. C. The first was a message to my own congregation of the First Baptist Church. The second was delivered at a union service held at the Gordon Street Christian Church. The third was first used at the Queen Street Methodist Episcopal Church. I have been encouraged to put them into permanent form by the kindly reception given them by these congregations.

Something of a sermon is lost when it appears in cold type, something that comes from the face to face relationship of preacher and people. If despite the loss enough remains to help some reader in the everyday activities of life, the purpose of the publication will have been realized.

Material for these sermons has come from numerous sources, but before it was used it had become the preacher's own. It should be said, however, that the third

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sermon has been built directly upon a subject and an outline of William L. Stidger in his book, "Symphonic Sermons," published by George H. Doran Co. The writer has found inspiration and much practical help in the methods and sermons of this great preacher and teacher.

T. C. J.

April 20, 1933
Kinston, North Carolina

WORDS

THE TRAGEDIES OF LANGUAGE

Text: James 3: 5. "Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things."

EPICTETUS was a Greek slave owned by a Roman master. Tradition says that on one occasion he was commanded by his master to prepare for his guests the best dinner that the market afforded.

The hour for the banquet arrived. The guests were reclining upon the banquet couches. The first course was brought in upon a covered platter. When the cover was lifted, it was found to consist of tongue. The second course was brought in and it, too, consisted of tongue. The third, the fourth, and all the courses likewise consisted of tongue.

The master was quite wroth and having summoned the slave began to upbraid him. "Did I not command you to serve for my guests the finest

dinner that the market affords; and lo, you have served nothing but tongue!"

Epictetus replied, "Oh, master, there is nothing more wonderful and fine than the tongue. By means of the tongue, men carry on social and business intercourse one with the other. By means of the tongue, the young man wooes the maiden. By means of the tongue friends lighten the sorrows of friends and inspire one another to nobler living." And so eloquently did he discourse upon the wonders of the tongue that the guests felt themselves to be well rewarded for their disappointing dinner and interceded for the slave, beseeching his master not to punish him.

The master agreed to remit the punishment upon one condition; namely, that the same guests re-assemble upon the following day and that the slave serve for them the meanest dinner that the market afforded.

The hour for the second dinner came and again the guests were reclining at the banquet table. The slave brought in the first course upon a covered platter. The cover was lifted and it was found to consist of tongue. The second course was brought in and it also was tongue. And so were the third, and the fourth, and all the courses.

The master was now angry indeed. Summoning Epictetus he cried out with indignation: "How now, slave, do you account for what has happened, or explain your wretched failure to execute my orders. Yesterday I commanded that you serve the finest dinner that the market afforded; and you served tongue, saying that there is nothing finer and more wonderful than the tongue. And now, today when I have ordered that you serve the meanest dinner the market affords, you again serve tongue."

Then did Epictetus reply: "Oh, master, there is nothing so mean as the

tongue. By means of the tongue men do wound the hearts of their friends. By means of the tongue hatreds, jealousies, and bitternesses are engendered. By means of the tongue come many of the evils of life." And so eloquently did he discourse upon the meanness of the tongue, that again the guests interceded in his behalf and the slave went unpunished.

Something of the thought of Epictetus must have been in the mind of the Apostle James, when he wrote, "Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be."

Some one has very truly said: "The greater the blessing, the greater becomes the curse of it when misused." Is not this true of the tongue?

Language is one of God's noblest gifts to man. The ability to transfer thought from one mind to the mind of another is one of the distinguishing capacities of man, raising him from

bestiality to fellowship with God himself. Words, words of beauty and truth, words of hope and cheer, words of faith and trust—how they glorify man! The wise Solomon never spoke more wisely than when he said, "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver."

Can we not each recall how at times when we have been disappointed and discouraged, some one has spoken to us a word of cheer and hope? Or how once when the heart was crushed with grief and the dark shadows of sorrow were round about us, a word of love and sympathy came to us like a golden ray of sunlight piercing through the blackness of a mid-summer cloud?

One cannot read the words of some gentle poet without being stirred and inspired. One cannot hear the matchless words of some mighty orator without being uplifted. But most of all, one cannot listen to the lisping of words by baby lips calling "Daddy,"

without feeling that life is precious and worth the living.

And yet, how cruel, how dangerous, how terrible words can be! Most of the wars of history have been precipitated by a word. Many a human heart has been pierced and lacerated by a thoughtless word. Many a pure woman's reputation has been marred and spoiled by mean and hateful words. Many a home has been wrecked by bitter, stinging words.

When rightly used, words are beautiful, wonderful, glorious. When wrongly used, words are devilish.

There are three great misuses of words. I would call them the tragedies of language, for each produces catastrophies of tragic proportions.

The first of these is profanity. No habit is more lacking in reason than is the habit of taking God's name in vain. The thief expects to benefit by his thievery. The drunkard claims a physical satisfaction from his drinking.

The gambler seeks a profit in his gambling. But one who is profane knows that no possible benefit or satisfaction can result from his profanity. The commandment against it is the only one of the ten that carries a threat. "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord, thy God, in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain." Emphasis falls upon the phrase, "the Lord will not hold him guiltless."

And yet profanity remains one of our most wide-spread vices. We hear it on the street corners, in places of amusement, on the trains and busses. It used to be considered, I believe, a trait of masculinity, but alas it knows no gender at the present! Girls and women, too, are guilty. An oath upon the lips of a rough man sounds bad enough, but upon the lips of a lovely girl, or beautiful woman, it becomes far more ugly and hideous. God has done so much for men and women that

to use his name profanely is as revolting as is a word of slander spoken by a son against his mother.

Sometimes a man who has carelessly used God's name turns to me and offers an apology because I am a minister. No such apology is ever due to me. Profanity in the presence of the preacher is no worse than profanity in the presence of a layman. The sin is not against a man whose profession is in the church, but against God himself. He hears every heedless, careless use of his name. But this sin of profanity is even more a sin against the person using it.

"What harm does profanity do?" you ask. Simply this: one cannot lightly use the divine terms and still maintain his spiritual sensitivity. Just as you cannot drag a delicate garment through the dust without soiling and marring it; so can you not impiously employ sacred words without spoiling for your future usage these same words.

Can the lips that have irreverently spoken sacred words adjust themselves in the self same words to earnest prayer? Hardly.

Profanity, then, isolates the soul of man from God. When one needs Him in the stress and strain of living, when one would summon Him in the loneliness of some great sorrow, He cannot be called upon by a tongue habituated to profanity.

The second great misuse of language is lying. This is not a nice word. We instinctively despise a lie and a liar. It is a word about which men fight. "You are a liar" is everywhere a challenge to physical combat. And because we so hate lies, when we ourselves are guilty we seek a pleasanter term. We speak of "telling fibs" and of "little white lies," or we use the more polite term "falsehood." But every untruth is a lie.

Swift, in "Gulliver's Travels," tells how Gulliver came at last into the land

of horses, where language and reason belonged to horses, not to men. With great difficulty he mastered the strange speech. One day in conversation with a wise old horse, he undertook to translate the word lie, but could find no corresponding word in the speech of these animals. In circuitous words he explained that in the land of men from which he came, men sometimes said to other men "that which is not." "What," said the old horse, "is not language given in order that one may say 'that which is,' and why should one wish to say 'that which is not'?" How strange indeed it is that words given us as a medium of thought and truth should be employed to mislead thought and to conceal truth!

The practice of lying is a practice that once begun results in the weaving of a fabric of falsehood. The poet was right when he wrote:

"Oh, what a tangled web we weave,
When first we practise to deceive."

For one lie calls for another to prevent the detection of the first, and the second for the third, and so indefinitely.

A mother once said to me that her little boy distressed her because he told lies. Not many days thereafter I heard her tell her little son to play in the back-yard while she was gone up-town. But she didn't go up-town. She went to a nearby neighbor's house. She had told him she was going up-town because she feared he might follow her to the neighbor's house. But still she wondered why the little boy told lies! Parents, who themselves set the example, need not be surprised when children early form the lying habit.

The consequence of the practice of lying is destruction of that confidence and faith without which business and social intercourse is impossible. If the time should ever come when we could not believe what most people tell us, the foundation of civilized society would crumble. For commerce of all

kinds is built upon the truthfulness and the honesty of those who conduct it. Let it become evident that the storekeeper will not tell the truth about his goods, and his customers will go elsewhere. Let the suspicion arise that the advertisements of a business firm are conceived in falsehood and that firm's days are numbered. Let a friend learn that his friend has told him one lie, and all the future relationship is spoiled by a never-ending suspicion that perhaps another lie is being told.

You remember the old fable of the boy sent to watch the sheep. He was told that he should cry, "Wolf! Wolf!" if danger threatened his flock. One day, for fun, when no danger was near, he cried, "Wolf! Wolf!" And all the men of the village ran to help him. But there was no wolf. Some days later he tried the same plan, and again all the men of the village came out only to find that again they had been tricked. But not long thereafter a wolf did come.

It fell upon the flock, and the boy in terror cried aloud, "Wolf! Wolf!" But no help came and the sheep were slaughtered, for the men of the village thought that again the lad was lying.

When confidence has been lost, it is restored only with the greatest possible difficulty. If your home folks, or your neighbors know you sometimes lie, they come to doubt your every statement. The faith upon which love and friendship thrive has vanished away.

I think that people who habitually tell lies lose ultimately the capacity for recognizing and discerning the truth. They live in the dim twilight of untruth, half believing the lies they have themselves fabricated.

The third great misuse of language has sometimes been called a vice peculiar to women. But it is practised by men as well. I refer to indulgence in gossip. How destructive it is to human happiness! How it persists even in the midst of church people! What tragedies it

culminates in! Homes are broken, hearts are bruised, reputations are under-mined, and pain is inflicted by apparently harmless gossip. The Woman's Missionary Society or the Sunday School Class meetings may be transformed by it from a place for serving God into a place for dissecting human souls!

Virgil pictures rumor as beginning in the dust. At first it crawls along the ground upon its belly; then growing bolder it lifts itself into the atmosphere, and walks erect. With mushroom growth it expands until it reaches to the sky. Thus does gossip grow!

Did you ever play the game called gossip? The players sit in a circle. Beginning at the given point, one player whispers a statement to the player who is next. Then round the circle goes the whisper until it returns to its source. Then the first player tells what he said and the last player tells what he heard. And there's never

any similarity in what was first said and what was last heard. This is gossip. Perhaps it begins in an innocent truth or half-truth, but when it has been bandied about the community it never resembles the statements with which it was begun. Perhaps it began as a joke, but it ends in ugly reality. Perhaps it began thoughtlessly, but it ends in purposive malice.

It is uncontrollable because it moves so rapidly that it cannot be checked upon. There is no defense against it and no recourse, because it is anonymous. "Where did you hear that?" some one asks. "Oh, they say so," is the answer. Who "they" might be one cannot learn. "Everybody" is equally undiscoverable, when it is declared "everybody knows that."

Yet I can conceive of this ugly thing called gossip being made very lovely and very beautiful. If each of us would whisper to our friends of something good and fine we have observed

in someone else, if every person who repeats a rumor would repeat only that which might promote happiness, if compliments rather than criticism were passed on, if flowers were cast rather than brickbats at some poor weak sinful creature, then might gossip become a constructive force for righteousness. We try to live up to, or down to, what people think and say of us. If our good were talked about and our bad forgotten, we might rise to heights of goodness as yet undreamed of. But gossip, always it seems, selects for its theme the bad, the tainted, the mean.

Here are three great misuses of the tongue, three tragedies of language: profanity, lying, and gossip. Surely James was right. "Even so the tongue is a little member, but boasteth great things."

"The tongue hath no man tamed," he adds. It can be tamed only by the grace of God, the love of Jesus Christ. But the tragedies of language must be barred from the stage of Christian life.

WALLS

SAFETY FOR THE LITTLE ONES

Text: Deuteronomy 22: 8. "When thou buildest a new house, then thou shalt make a battlement for the roof, that thou bring not blood upon thine house, if any man fall from thence."

STRETCHING across interior China are the crumbling ruins of an ancient wall built to keep back the horde of Mongolians from the ancient civilization of the land. A similar ruined wall in Britain reminds the traveller there of the days when Roman invaders sought to protect their holdings from the barbaric Celts of the highlands. Every ancient city was fortified by walls; Medieval castles had their battlements, strong walls of protection against the raids of hostile clans.

The words of the text refer to a different sort of protection. Picture a house in old Palestine. It is built square and flat. Upon its roof guests are entertained and children play in the cool of the evening. The Deuteronomic

code commanded that the householder build around its edges a battlement to safe-guard those who might seek rest and recreation upon the roof. Failure to build the battlement might endanger life and limb. But if one should fall from the roof despite the battlement, the householder was to be considered free from responsibility.

Today we build no city walls, for our modern method of warfare renders them useless as a protection against an enemy. But we still provide what protection we deem necessary to preserve our land. Today we build no battlements upon our roofs, but we should erect whatever spiritual walls of protection we may around the children that play within our homes. We protect our money by placing it within the vault of some strong bank. We protect our homes by insurance policies. We protect our health by due sanitary precautions.

Houses and lands, money and jewels, physical possessions of all kinds are valued highly. But the most valuable asset of any land is the childhood of the land. Houses are made beautiful and charming by furniture, pictures, rugs, and tapestries, but the children in the home are worth more than are they all. Every parent agrees to this, but not every parents acts upon it to the extent of establishing such walls about the house as will protect little children from the manifold dangers of a complex modern civilization.

Oh, yes, most intelligent parents seek to protect their children from disease and from physical injury. There is no cause for complaint along these lines against the modern mother. The older generation used to wonder what kind of a mother the war-period flapper would make. The truth of it is that she has made about as good a job of motherhood, if not a better job, than

did the simpering maidens of an earlier age.

I take off my hat to the young mothers of today! They know more about diet than did any old granny, or even the family doctor of the long ago. They've mastered the science of taking care of babies quite as well as the science of bridge. They love their little ones quite as much as did the old-fashioned mother. And they take care of their physical needs and their psychological needs even more intelligently than did the mother of yesterday. They've tremendously lowered infant mortality!

But children are not little animals. Children are spiritual beings, created for eternity. If modern parents are failing at all today, their failure lies in the realm of religious and moral safe-guards of childhood. Whether modern parents are more guilty here than parents of other generations, I do not know, but I do know that in every

age, many parents have failed miserably to protect their children from the disease of sin.

One of the most tragic pictures in all the Old Testament is that of David, vividly drawn in the eighteenth chapter of Second Samuel. Think of him as he stood there upon the city's wall, not a king fearful for his throne, though his throne was threatened; not a general concerned over the battle being waged by his armies, though such a crucial battle was in progress; but a father sick with worry over the fate of his boy. Absalom, his son, had revolted against him.

And the watchman said to the king: "Behold, a man running alone. Methinketh his running is like the running of Ahimaaz, the son of Zadok."

And the king said: "He is a good man and bringeth good tidings."

And again the watchman said: "Behold another man running alone."

And the king said: "He, too, bringeth tidings."

Then drew near Ahimaaz with a report of victory upon the battle field, but David's question was: "Is the young man, Absalom, safe?" Ahimaaz did not know.

Then came Cushi who also bore tidings of how the armies of the king had put to flight the troops of the rebellion. But David, putting aside these reports, again inquired: "Is the young man, Absalom, safe?"

And Cushi replied: "The enemies of my lord the king, and all that rise against thee to do thee hurt be as that young man is." And David, the father, knew that Absalom, the son, was dead.

Flooding back upon the tide of memory must have come the recollection of Absalom as a little boy, playing about the castle's grounds, as a lad receiving the instructions of his teachers, as a youth, handsome and gay.

And the king wept bitterly. Climbing up the steps to the little room over the gate, his back must have been bent, and his steps must have faltered as he cried out: "Oh, my son, Absalom, my son, my son, Absalom! Would God that I had died for thee, Oh, Absalom, my son, my son!"

Yes, David was great as a poet, mighty as a king, successful as a general. But as a father he failed and failed miserably. And the victory, and the success, and the glory, were as nothing when his boy was dead.

The father cannot die for his son, but the father and the mother together can build such walls of protection around sons and daughters as will withstand many of the foes from without.

The responsibility of parenthood is a joint responsibility. It cannot be borne by the mother alone, nor by the father alone. Too often the father shirks his share. Perhaps you have heard the story of the farmer who felt

that the business of rearing children was the woman's business. And so in the night when the baby cried he offered no assistance. One night, after a day that had been unusually trying for the mother, the baby woke, as babies still do sometimes, in the middle of the night. The mother, more tired than usual, punched the father. But the father turned over on the other side and snored on.

Then the mother crawled out of bed and ministered to the baby's needs. But a few minutes later the pigs out in the lot began to give evidence of some disturbance there. Quickly the father jumped out of bed, pulled on his pants, and went out to the pig lot to take care of the pigs.

When he came back the mother said to the father: "Well, husband, I know now the difference between the baby and the pigs. The pigs have a thorough-bred daddy, while the baby hasn't."

And she was right, for no baby has a thorough-bred daddy, if it has a daddy that isn't willing to share in the responsibilities of parenthood. But I believe we've made improvements along this line. More men today know how to tend to babies than ever before and fewer men are ashamed to be seen helping the wife take care of the kids than in other days. This wholesome trend is doubtlessly due to the rising tide of feminine equality and the resultant partnership relation between the sexes.

Just as the ancient Israelite built round his square roof four walls, so ought modern parents construct four spiritual walls about the children in the home, lest any fall and the guilt be upon that house.

The first of these is the wall of parental authority. We do not hear much about authority these days. There is lacking in the average home that discipline that makes for character. Modern psychology errs in its over-

emphasis upon expression and its distaste for restraint. Human personality develops only in the synthesis of expression and repression. No adult with reasonable intelligence ever gives expression to every impulse and emotion that rises up within him. Reason puts on the brakes.

But in the child reason has not sufficiently developed to provide a wise restraint. Consequently external authority must prevent unwholesome and disastrous impulses. The parent ought, in proportion to the stage of reasoning reached, undertake to guide the conduct of a child without resorting to arbitrary commands. But there are times when children need to feel the compulsion of parental authority. It serves to teach them that in the social life of human beings, restraint from without must be expected. Freedom for all comes only as each recognizes the limitations imposed by physical and social environment. The

widespread lawlessness of today can be curbed for tomorrow only by teaching respect for authority within the homes of today. If repression of childhood in the homes of our Puritan ancestors was cruel, unrestrained expression in the modern home is equally cruel. Neither prepare the child to take his place in a well-ordered human society.

The second wall that ought to be built around childhood is the wall of parental watchfulness. The child needs to be watched, to be studied by the parents. Such watchfulness is not spying. No one should spy upon another. But the child ought to be known by the parent. What games he plays, with whom he plays, where he goes, what he does — these are the things with which the parent ought to be concerned and informed. The gardens are watched for weeds and insects, the business is studied for possible leakages of profit, the house is inspected for proper plumbing and lighting. Are not little

children more important than all these?

It takes a lot of time to be a good parent, but woe unto the one that delegates all the tasks of looking after the children to hired servants. And woe unto the parent who lets the children roam like worthless little animals, never knowing where they are, never caring. I've known and you've known parents who were so involved in work or in play as never to have time to keep up with the children. And then when they have grown up and brought upon themselves dishonor and disgrace, the same parents have been utterly amazed that such a thing could come upon their homes. Yes, it's easier, like David of old, to say, "Oh, my son, my son!" or "Oh, my daughter, my daughter! would to God I had died for thee," than to live for and with the son or daughter, keeping a vigilant watchfulness.

Nor should this watchfulness limit itself to the physical things of life.

Some parents are careful of the child's diet, but careless of its reading. Some see to it that the teeth are brushed, but fail to watch after the dawning curiosity about sex. Some guard against exposure to disease, but fail to prevent exposure to the suggestion of some lurid moving picture. Some watch the body and the mind, but pay no heed to the starving soul. In all of these things, parental watchfulness may be the wall that prevents a disastrous fall.

The third wall is that of parental love and sympathy. And here, too, part of modern psychology falls into error. There are those who hold that affection must not be shown, that children must not be petted, that emotion unbalances childhood. Certainly there is a slushy sentimentality about children that may sap normal growth and prevent sane development. There is a silly sort of baby talk that is disgusting. There is a selfish parental love, gone to seed, that stifles initiative, breaks down

self-reliance and delays maturity. The wise parent will avoid these excesses.

But as sunshine is to the plant, so is love to childhood. No child thrives in an atmosphere that lacks it. Institutional children may have exactly the right diet, a perfect schedule of hours, the most scientific daily regime, but they never thrive quite like the child in the normal home. For the parental love and sympathy that every child has need of as an individual person no institution can give. Children need the sense of security that comes to those who are certain of love and care. Be he ever so undemonstrative the little boy needs to know that some one understands and sympathizes with his boyish concerns. Be she ever so independent the little girl needs to be quite sure that some one loves and protects her in her girlish interests.

Of course every parent loves every child in the home. Sacrifices are gladly made for the children's sake. Work,

tedious tiresome work, is patiently done by both father and mother because of love for the little ones. But what I'm talking about now is letting that love be known, making it evident to a childish mind. It's done not by words, but by attitudes. Taking time to play with one's children, bestowing upon them, not rich gifts, but little treasures meaningless to the adult, preparing for them glad surprises — these are the evidences of love that children understand. And they pay rich dividends in a wealth of affection from childish hearts.

The fourth and final wall that ought to inclose innocent childhood from the dangers that infest our modern world is the wall of parental example. It's the hardest of all the walls to build, but it is the most essential of the four. For children learn more through unconscious imitation than through all the verbal instruction aimed at them.

You may tell a child what not to do as vehemently as you please, but if you

yourself practice the forbidden act the child will learn it too. To the mind of the child the father and the mother are just what a man and a woman ought to be. They watch you when you think their interest is in other things. They understand far more about you than you give them credit for. Your conduct is the pattern by which they would fashion their own.

Is a child cross, irritable, impolite? Almost certainly these are qualities most often displayed within his home. No truer word was ever spoken than the affirmation that what the child does reflects upon the parents. I have taught in preparatory schools and colleges, and always I have been able to judge with more than a fair degree of accuracy from what kind of a home a boy or a girl has come by studying the conduct of the boy or the girl. The things you value, your child will value. The attitude you assume toward God, and man, and life, he too will likely assume.

When you build your house, when children are given you as one of God's richest gifts, build well your battlements. Around the little ones erect the wall of parental authority, the wall of parental watchfulness, the wall of parental love, and the wall of parental example, lest one of these little ones be lost to fine and noble manhood or womanhood.

I never speak of parental responsibility and parental duty without remembering the words of Portia in "The Merchant of Venice":

"If to do were as easy as to know what were what were good to do
Chapels had been churches and poor men's cottages prince's palaces;
It's a good divine that follows his own instruction."

Yes, it's easier to tell how children ought to be reared than it is to do it. And no parent has any right to under-

take the job without seeking and depending upon divine wisdom, divine goodness, and divine love. Every child is entitled to a Christian mother, a Christian father.

CIRCLES

THE CHRISTIAN CIRCLE

Text: John 12: 23. "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me."

A FEW weeks ago a friend of mine who is studying in Boston, Massachusetts, wrote me that he had come across four lines of poetry that contain enough dynamite to revolutionize the Christian Church. The lines to which he referred were those of Edwin Markham, great American poet:

"He drew a circle that shut me out —
Heretic, rebel, a thing to flout.
But Love and I had the wit to win:
We drew a circle that took him in."

Dynamite? Yes, there's dynamite in this quatrain!

I have heard that Markham had accumulated a fortune of some $40,000 by the time he reached the age of seventy. It was his security against old age, then upon him. It was the savings

of a life-time. But a friend whom he trusted, betrayed him, and his fortune was swept away. A lesser man would have been plunged into bitterness and despair, but in circumstances like this Markham was able to write:

"But Love and I had the wit to win;
We drew a circle that took him in."

I want to use this couplet as the symphonic theme of my sermon this morning. I want to repeat it over and over until it lodges itself in your minds and sings itself into your hearts.

"But Love and I had the wit to win;
We drew a circle that took him in."

Do you remember when as a child you used to stand upon the banks of some quiet stream and throw into the still water a rock, a clod of dirt, or a piece of wood, and watch the circles form upon the surface, spreading themselves unto the very edges of the water? The larger the object thrown, the

greater its weight, the larger and deeper were the circles it made. Human beings are somewhat like that. The size of a person's character, the extent to which his mind and soul has grown, is reflected in the size of the circle that limits his interest, his sympathy, and his love. How big a circle do you live in?

"But Love and I had the wit to win;
We drew a circle that took him in."

How many have you taken into your circle?

There are all kinds of circles. There are radio circles that spread themselves through the ether and go on forever. With the right equipment a sound made in the most remote part of the world can be carried to every home in the world and then be picked up and amplified into clear meaning by another sort of equipment. It is said that every sound vibration started since the dawn of time is still throbbing through the

universe. Dreamers predict that some day an instrument will be invented that will enable one to tune in upon Demosthenes thundering his philippics in Athens, upon Cicero denouncing Cataline in the Roman senate, or upon Jesus of Nazareth delivering in soft Aramaic his matchless sermon on the mount. Whether or not such dreams will come to fruition, I know not. I do know, however, that the circles started by these men still expand themselves, still echo in the souls of men, and never shall end.

The Old Testament drew a circle, a circle that limited true religion to a selected group of people, the descendants of Abraham. Only now and then did even the most discerning prophet of the Ancient Hebrews dare to think that Jehovah God was a God for tribes and nations other than their own. They undertook to circumscribe the love of God. Even within the circle of national proportions they drew smaller

circles to include only the more favored ones. The universality of God's love and care was inconceivable to them.

Included in this Old Testament is the wonderful little book of Jonah, the writer of which did seem to sense the falseness of the circle drawn by his compatriots. We have spent so much time arguing about the possibility, or probability, of a whale's swallowing a man, that most of us have missed the lesson of the book.

Jonah was commanded by the voice of God to go to the city of Nineveh and there to preach that unless repentance were made that great and wicked city would be destroyed. But Jonah was not interested in the Ninevites. The circle of his love did not extend to take in Nineveh. He thought God's should not. Doubtlessly he said to himself: "These people are not my people. Why should I concern myself about what becomes of them? Let them be destroyed; that's what they

deserve." And so he fled in the opposite direction. What happened, you already know.

How much progress has been made in human thinking and human emotion since the time of Jonah? You have heard — have you not? — the old story often told in the pulpit of the woman who used to pray: "Lord, bless me and my husband, John; our son, Jim; his wife, Mary; us four and no more." God never heard a prayer like that. A circle so small as that has no room in it for God to act. Jonah and people of his ilk could never attain the wisdom of one who says:

"But Love and I had the wit to win;
We drew a circle that took him in."

The New Testament, too, draws a circle. It is the circle of Jesus. Whom did he take in?

At the well of Samaria one day, Jesus stopped to rest. The disciples had gone on ahead to buy food. As

the long afternoon drew near its close, a woman of Samaria came that she might draw water from the well. She belonged to a despised tribe. The Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans, not so much as to speak to them. But this woman, even among her own lowly people, claimed no prestige and no honor. She was a sinner. Did Jesus draw a circle of race and class to shut her out? He did not. One of the greatest sermons he ever preached, he preached to this one sinful soul of an alien group.

"Love and Jesus had the wit to win;
They drew a circle that took her in."

Let me bring you another picture of Jesus, our Lord. See him there as they bring to him a woman taken in the very act of adultery. Look at her as she stands before him, ashamed and afraid.

"Master," says one of these who brought her to judgment, "shall we stone her, according to the law?"

I think Jesus must have looked at her, must have read in her cringing attitude the shame that was hers, must have sensed the dire need and utter despair in her trembling form. And then he must have looked at her accusers. He must have seen the smirk of satisfaction upon their hypocritical countenances and must have sensed their evil in the glee manifested over one who had been caught. "Let him that is without sin cast the first stone," he said, and stooping he wrote upon the ground. What he wrote I do not know. Maybe he drew a circle. But as he wrote those guilty wretches that would have hidden their own sin in outward abhorrence of another's sin, slunk one by one away.

Then lifting his head to find the woman standing alone, he said, "Woman, doth no man accuse thee?"

And she replied, "No man, Lord."

In tones of gentle love, he must have

spoken as he said, "Neither do I condemn thee, go and sin no more."

"Love and He had the wit to win;
They drew a circle that took the sinner in."

The circle of Jesus did not shut out Peter when he denied his Lord. See him standing there declaring, "I never knew him"; and then raising his eyes to behold the pain and the sorrow in the eyes of the Master passing by the door. But when the risen Lord sent the woman to bear witness of his resurrection he said to them, "Go tell my disciples and Peter." Yes, he drew a circle taking in one who had failed to keep the faith, one who had fallen in an hour of testing, one who had broken his pledge of loyalty. Yet that same Peter was to be the agent through whom thousands would learn to place their faith in Jesus and pledge allegiance to His cause. Looking down on Peter as he preached that magnifi-

cent sermon on the day of Pentecost, Jesus could say:

"But Love and I had the wit to win;
We drew a circle that took him in."

The circle of Jesus took in a thief that hung with him upon a cross. "This day shalt thou be with me in Paradise" was a promise of inclusion to one whose wickedness had brought him with justice to the agonies of crucifixion. The circle of Jesus took in those that nailed him on the tree. "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do" was a prayer in an hour of bitterest anguish that enlarged the circle to include the hardest of sinners.

"Love and Jesus had the wit to win;
They drew a circle that took all in."

But the lesson of an all-inclusive circle was not one easily learned by the followers of Jesus. A special vision from heaven was necessary to teach Peter that the Christian circle was large

enough to include the Macedonians. All down through the history of the Christian Church we find evidence of circles being drawn smaller than the circle of Jesus. Among Protestants, denominational circles were early drawn; and until relatively recent times, there was jealousy and strife between churches of but slightly different faiths. Baptists shut out Methodists. Methodists shut out Baptists, and other groups drew circles large enough only for a few favored ones, who thought alike upon some minor point of doctrine or of order. Thanks be unto God for the spirit of brotherhood now generally prevailing among all Protestant branches of the church and for the ever increasing extent of co-operation among the sects of Christianity! There's room in the Christian circle for Methodists, Presbyterians, Lutherans, Christians, Episcopalians, and all.

But let us not quickly conclude that even in this present day the Christian Church has drawn a circle as large as the circle of Jesus. Are there not still in our midst those whose interests are limited to local work and local objects? Is it not still difficult to secure the real interest of many of our most active church members in foreign missions? We know of churches that meet with some ease their budgets for local causes, but pay scant heed to the appeals for more distant causes. By action, they say, like Jonah of old, "Religion is for us and our children, let the heathen work out their own salvation." How foreign is this to the spirit of Jesus!

"But Love and I had the wit to win;
We drew a circle that took him in."

Yes, the circle of Jesus took in Jew and Gentile, Chinese and Japanese, Hindu and Brahman, black and white, yellow and brown. There were no geographical circles drawn by him.

In the modern world today there are two particular kinds of circles being drawn, the racial circles and the national circles. Germany tried to draw a Teutonic circle, France a French circle, England an English circle. And the world war came with all its years of fearsome bloodshed and destruction. Today nations are again busy drawing circles of nationalism that will, unless halted, inevitably lead to clashes. We have our League of Nations, our Kellogg Pact, our Disarmament Conferences, but we shall not have world peace guaranteed until mankind learns to enlarge the circle of its brotherhood, to make its own the circle of Jesus Christ. If mutual sympathy, love and and trust could replace fear and jealousy, suspicion and hatred among the nations, if so-called "splendid isolation" could be supplanted with "splendid interaction," most of the troubles of the age in which we live would vanish away.

Racial problems in our home land tend to grow more acute because we draw circles that shut out those whose color chances to be black. The Christian circle should include in the South, the negro. His problems are partly our problems and our problems are partly his problems. Let us not be misunderstood, as it is so easy to be misunderstood when one touches upon vital current issues. The best thought of neither Whites nor Blacks favors social equality, but the spirit of Christianity does demand equal justice, equal protection, mutual co-operation.

"But Love and I had the wit to win;
We drew a circle that took him in."

We must get back in our churches to the circle of Jesus. Religious intolerance, bitter factionalism, limited sympathy, and restricted interests must be banished from the hearts and minds of those who would enjoy fellowship with Jesus Christ. As the circle of love

for our fellow men grows larger and larger we have more room for Him who said: "If I be lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men with me." Not some. Not Americans. Not white men. But all men.

I have heard somewhere an old Indian legend. In a certain tribe of Indians in the West, the chieftain was chosen by some test and not because he was a chieftain's son. Once when the old chief had grown infirm and too weak to lead his braves into battle or on the buffalo hunt, all the young men of the tribe were called together. The wise man of the tribe pointed to the distant mountain whose peak seemed to pierce the skies above. He said to them: "Tomorrow morning when first the sun appears you shall start a race up the mountain side, and he who goes the farthest shall be our chief."

The day dawned clear and bright and as the first rays of the sun streaked the gray heavens, every young warrior

rushed forth from camp and began the conquest of the mountain's side. In the afternoon, spent and worn, they straggled back, one by one. There came one who bore in his hands a scraggy piece of hemlock. "O my people," he said, "I climbed so high up the mountain that flowers and giant trees were no more, and all that I could see were scraggy hemlocks."

And all the people said, "You have done well."

Then there came back into camp another brave, bearing in his hand a bit of shale. "O my people, " said he, "behold this bit of shale, I went so high up the mountain side, that there was no vegetation of any kind, and all that I could see was rock and shale."

And all the people said, "You have done well, indeed."

But just as the sun went down and twilight shadows began to gather, there came another runner, panting and exhausted from the race. "O my people,"

he said with laboring breath, "I bring you in my hands nothing; for where I went there was nothing. I climbed to the summit of yonder mountain. I looked out toward the west. And O, my people, I bring back to you the memories of a vision, a vision of the deep blue waters of the distant sea."

And all the people said, "You have done the best of all, and you shall be our chief."

Thus it ever is. He who sees the farthest, and catches a clear vision of the deep blue waters of the sea of service and of love becomes the leader. Such a one lifts up Jesus best and all men who see are drawn to him.

"But Love and I had the wit to win;
We drew a circle that took him in."

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